

## Viewpoints: Schools and Accountability

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*"Viewpoints" is a place on Chapelboro where local people are encouraged to share their unique perspectives on issues affecting our community. All thoughts, ideas, opinions and expressions in this series are those of the author, and do not reflect the work, reporting or approval of 97.9 The Hill and Chapelboro.com. If you'd like to contribute a column on an issue you're concerned about, interesting happenings around town, reflections on local life — or anything else — send a submission to [viewpoints@wchl.com](mailto:viewpoints@wchl.com).*

### Editor's note, April 18, 2025

*This Viewpoints submission was originally published on September 13, 2024, with the title "CHCCS Permits Sexual Violence in Schools and Refuses Accountability."*

*On March 31, 2025, the United States District Court for the Middle District of North Carolina granted summary judgment to the CHCCS Board of Education and all other defendants, dismissing all of Rebecca Fox's claims.*

*The judge issued a 61-page decision highlighting the numerous prompt and reasonable steps taken by the school and district staff to address Ms. Fox's complaints. A full record of case proceedings, including the decision document, [can be found here](#).*

*The title of this submission has been changed to reflect this development, but the piece itself remains published on Chapelboro.com as a record of Fox's claims and proof of consideration and response prior to judiciary investigation and dismissal.*

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## Schools and Accountability

### *A perspective from Rebecca Fox*

Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools pays lip service to restorative justice, trauma-informed practice, and community accountability. When our 5-year-old was sexually assaulted at Frank Porter Graham Bilingual, we learned *del dicho al hecho hay mucho trecho*: it's all talk and no action.

While our family experienced this nightmare, school leaders responsible turned their backs on us. This was especially painful because they were my colleagues, people with whom I thought I had collegial relationships and shared values.

I was the Speech Language Pathologist at FPG Bilingual for over four years. I loved my job and planned to be there for many more. The feeling seemed mutual. My FPG Bilingual colleagues honored me as the 2018-19 Support Staff Employee of the Year, a distinction I still hold dear.

My care for the FPG Bilingual community, and my fear for students' safety, were powerful influences in my family's decision to file a lawsuit against Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools Board of Education and some of its leaders.

Our then-five-year-old daughter was violently and repeatedly sexually assaulted at FPG Bilingual by her kindergarten classmate. When my husband and I learned about these horrifying assaults, we duly reported them and expected our school community to respond with care. We thought then-Principal Emily Bivins and then-Assistant Principal Karen Galassi-Ferrer would take steps to ensure our daughter could attend school safely and that no child was ever sexually assaulted at FPG Bilingual again.

Instead, Dr. Bivins responded with callousness, minimizing our daughter's assaults as "tickling," asking her if she liked it. She and her boss, Dr. Misti Williams, pushed for our daughter—not the boy who assaulted her—to move to another classroom. Ms. Galassi-Ferrer never acknowledged our reports in any way.

We were forced to keep our daughter home from school for nearly a month while we awaited an adequate safety plan from the school. After asking for an update, we were finally told our daughter could stay in her classroom, and that supervision in one location would improve.

We allowed our daughter to return to kindergarten. She went back excited but came home scared. She saw the boy who attacked her all day long: at morning meeting, lunch, and recess. After we reported him threatening her, Dr. Bivins complained about our family's "demands," and said it was "not possible" for our daughter to not share settings with her assailant. Then Dr. Bivins requested both our daughters be removed from FPG Bilingual. "This just won't end. Go to Carrboro already."

Rather than addressing the problem of safety and sexual violence at FPG Bilingual, the CHCCS Board, Dr. Bivins, Dr. Williams and their colleagues wanted to get rid of our family.

I was heartbroken to leave my job and community, but we felt we had no choice. The district made clear they would not take necessary steps to keep our children safe. We withdrew them from the district, and I resigned.

In the process of litigation, I have been horrified to learn of at least seven student-on-student sexual assaults occurring at FPG Bilingual, before and after our daughter's. These children and their families received a similar dismissive response from leaders.

## EXHIBIT 2

Another FPG family has filed a lawsuit against the CHCCS Board, Dr. Bivins, Ms. Galassi-Ferrer, and Dr. Williams for mishandling their child's sexual assault at school.

I worked in public schools for years, as a classroom teacher and a Speech Language Pathologist. School and district leaders place huge emphasis on "accountability" when they mean test scores. At every turn, the Board and its agents have refused genuine accountability for the sexually violent atmosphere they permitted at FPG Bilingüe. They have blamed our daughter and other children for the sexual abuse they suffered while under their care.

Our daughter's sexual assault at school was not an isolated incident but part of a pattern of leaders ignoring sexual abuse at FPG Bilingüe and allowing it to spread, then sweeping hurting families under the rug – or out of school – rather than helping them. Being a "good" school district doesn't prevent sexual violence in schools. Responsible leadership, clear communication, and strong protocols and policies to protect children from sexual violence does.

This experience has been profoundly traumatic for our family, and we don't want to deepen that trauma. The lawsuit has been hard, and speaking out publicly is terrifying. But I've told my daughters and my students they have to speak up when something is wrong.

The sexual abuse our daughter and other children experienced at FPG Bilingüe was wrong. FPG and CHCCS leaders' indifference to multiple instances of sexual abuse was wrong. Our family deserves accountability and justice. All children at FPG Bilingüe and throughout CHCCS deserve to be safe from sexual violence at school, and families deserve responsible leaders who care about their children, with actions and not just words.

**Rebecca Fox** lives in Chapel Hill with her family. A former Durham Public Schools dual language teacher, she earned a Master of Elementary Curriculum and Instruction, with endorsements in Bilingual Education and ESL, at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and a Master in Speech Language Pathology at UNC Chapel Hill. Her attorney is Shayla Richberg.

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**Editor's note: Andy Jenks, Chief Communications Officer of CHCCS, submitted a direct response to Chapelboro:**

*We dispute Ms. Fox's version of events, and we find her article to be replete with inaccuracies. However, in compliance with confidentiality laws and out of respect for the privacy of all children involved, we are unable to respond to each point individually. A motion to dismiss this lawsuit is currently pending in federal court, and our school has denied wrongdoing in this matter.*

*CHCCS acknowledges that these allegations were investigated by the school and independently investigated by law enforcement, which did not result in further action. While it is not appropriate to issue further public comment at this time, we look forward to sharing additional facts as requested by the court.*

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## 6 Comments



**Melanie Cecil** on September 14, 2024 at 10:21 am

These allegations do not surprise me. Both of our daughters attended CHCCS. One from kindergarten to high school matriculation and the other from 3rd grade through high school matriculation. We learned very early on that this school district will protect the bully/child with behavioural issues instead of the victim. Every. Single. Time. And any parent who has the timerity to raise concerns is reminded of how privileged they are to be able to send their child to the schools in this system. In other words: shut up and go away. It was among the happiest days of my life when our youngest child graduated from Chapel Hill High School. She is still struggling with the damage inflicted by protected school bullies.

REPLY



**Shayla Richberg** on September 22, 2024 at 12:42 pm

Thank you for sharing your experiences Melanie and standing with us on our stance against bullying and assault in our schools.

REPLY



**Myra M Dotson** on November 18, 2024 at 8:43 am

Years ago, the "quality of the CH/C public school system" was the basis for the higher prices and higher demand for real estate within the "district"... not so now... I never hear this "declaration" anymore...

This event and the resulting inactions are horrific.... I support the parents in their fight for justice and thank them for exposing the situations.... I salute their bravery..

REPLY

## EXHIBIT 2



**Laurie Lucas** on November 18, 2024 at 3:16 pm

I am so sorry this happened to your daughter. Words are not enough. Thank you for exposing it. I pray that the school has to be accountable for their actions and lack of inaction to protect your child, and the other victims!

REPLY



**Karen** on November 18, 2024 at 9:30 pm

It is not just Chapel Hill, a friend of mine and a teacher at the school had a child (girl) that was threatened repeatedly that she was going to get far than having her dress hiked up etc. Her school gave the boy paid counseling but nothing for her daughter. This was in Raleigh. Our entire Board of Education had better wake up and start taking this seriously!

REPLY



**Greg** on November 18, 2024 at 10:54 pm

I'm sorry to hear your child went through this – no child should have to go through that kind of experience at any age.

While some seem to be echoing similar stories, our experience with CHCCS was quite different. One of our children was threatened by a classmate in 2nd grade and made to feel physically unsafe. We reported it to the teacher that evening, and received a prompt reply from the teacher and principal the next day saying that the teacher had already reported a problem and that it was being addressed. The offending child was pulled from class for counseling, moved to another class later that week, and later that year expelled from the school entirely.

I felt for the other child, though I didn't know them, but the school did the right things to protect students from a child with a serious behavior issue.

REPLY

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